

1. Abstract of the Program

In September 2004, the County of San Diego developed the Community Services for Families (CSF) program in order to streamline the delivery of services for families at risk of child abuse or neglect. CSF is the product of an innovative 18-month planning process to design a continuum of support services based on a wide range of community input. As a result of this community-driven process, a number of support service contracts, with multiple funding streams, were blended in order to better serve this vulnerable population. The goal was to eliminate multiple agencies providing similar services, leverage resources and maximize available funds to provide better services. The planning process resulted in the development of a Request for Proposals that met all of these goals. The resulting CSF contracts are performance-based, outcome driven and support our local, State and national initiatives toward streamlining services for families. The County's CSF services are now provided through a collaborative network of community-based organizations, community partners and County staff who previously worked separately to serve the same families.

2. The Problem/Need for the Program

The County of San Diego contracts with community-based agencies to provide support services to families at risk of child abuse or neglect. Contracts for a variety of support services had been developed as new funding sources became available. In 2002, Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) staff identified a need to evaluate the current contract groups to determine if there were duplicative services, define gaps in services and evaluate the most effective use of available funding. This evaluation process became even more relevant in light of California's budgetary crisis and concerns that the State funding might be reduced or eliminated beginning in fiscal year 2003/04. Other factors that demonstrated the need for evaluating the current contracted support services included:

- Federal and State governments were encouraging counties to blend funding streams for child abuse prevention and intervention services.
- California's Child Welfare Services Redesign Initiative prioritized community-driven services and County/non-profit agency collaborations.
- California – Child and Families Service Review (C-CFSR), which is the State's response to the federal audit of the State's child welfare system, mandated outcomes that require governmental collaboration with community-based organizations to achieve success.
- A countywide Family-to-Family Initiative was initiated to expand the capacity of communities to care for their own children and families through the development of community-driven support services, identifying and training community leaders and developing neighborhood resource homes so children who need out-of-home care can remain in their own communities.

3. Description of the Program

Description: Community Services for Families provides community-based support services to families who are at-risk for child abuse or neglect. Services are provided primarily through home visitation and are individualized to meet the needs of each family member and to serve the

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family holistically. A comprehensive assessment leads to a family-driven case plan with achievable goals. Home visitation services focus on providing education on child development, alternative discipline methods, how to meet a child's basic needs, choosing safe and appropriate childcare, school readiness, dangers of childhood obesity and family self-sufficiency. Specialized services are provided to meet the unique needs of foster and relative caregivers to promote placement stability for children and reduce caregiver stress. All services, including parent education, are offered in Spanish and English. Additional services include support groups for parents and specialized training classes on such topics as ADHD, childhood health issues and child behavior problems. Wraparound funding is available to meet emergency and recreational needs of families. Services are leveraged by referring families to community partners, such as the faith community, for services such as food and housing assistance.

Planning and Implementation: A planning process was conducted to gather input from a broad spectrum of parties interested in the development of a Request for Proposals (RFP) for more efficient and effective support services for vulnerable families. Unlike many other counties, San Diego has only one advisory body to oversee the various child abuse prevention funding streams. The County Commission on Children, Youth and Families (Commission) is the advisory body. The Commission is composed of representatives from the County Board of Supervisors, consumers and the social services, education, law enforcement and juvenile probation systems. The Commission conducted activities to gather community and key stakeholder input. These activities included:

- A work group to evaluate the existing support services contracts,
- Community conversations,
- A key stakeholders group to develop the Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles for a continuum of services, and
- Community meetings to present the proposed continuum of support services and gather more input.

County staff utilized the input to develop the Work Statement for the RFP. The work group recommended re-naming the new services "Community Services for Families" (CSF) to emphasize the community's role in protecting children and in providing the needed support services. To continue the collaborative nature of this project, County staff facilitated three Industry Days where the community participated in developing outcomes and reviewed the draft CSF objectives/outcomes. This review period allowed community members to become aware of the new direction for these support services. Community-based agencies joined together and agreed on a lead agency, as well as sub-agencies that are best qualified to provide each part of the support service continuum.

Clientele Being Served: Services are provided to a range of families including those with documented incidents of child abuse or neglect, referrals to the Child Abuse Hotline assessed as needing prevention services and community referrals for primary prevention services.

Objectives: Child Safety, Child Well-Being, Permanency, Stable Living Environments and Community Development were chosen as the CSF objectives based on the priorities of the C-

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CFSR and the State CWS Redesign Initiative. Outcomes for each of the Objectives were developed to support:

- County of San Diego's Strategic Initiatives for Safe Kids, and Safe and Livable Communities;
- HHSA Strategic Initiatives to improve child health, increase access to health insurance coverage, address childhood obesity and reducing child abuse and neglect;
- State California-Child and Family Services Review (C-CSFR) outcomes related to preventing referrals to the Child Abuse Hotline, permanency in foster care placements and reducing subsequent removals of children after they are reunified with their families;
- CWS Redesign Initiative priorities for expanding the capacity of communities to protect their own children, including developing new foster homes in their communities so children who need out-of-home care can continue to reside in their own community, continue to attend the same school and stay connected to their support system.

4. Use of Technology

All CSF contractors utilize the same web-based data collection system to ensure effective communication among service providers. Having countywide contractors use the same database will support ongoing evaluation of the program so the County can determine what services are most effective in meeting the CSF outcomes. The database will also provide client data over multiple years and will be useful in establishing unit costs. Significant modifications have been made to customize the database for CSF. Training has been provided for all levels of staff and on-going technical support will be provided.

CSF families may need services from other County departments, such as housing, domestic violence, alcohol/drug abuse. These departments are making plans to use the CSF database for their contracts so data can be gathered across systems. Plans are being developed to further blend and cross-thread services for these families.

5. The Cost of the Program

No additional County operation or capital costs were incurred. The RFP work group members were County staff assigned as a part of their normal workload. Commission representatives included volunteers and County staff assigned to the Commission. Funding was available to retain a paid consultant (\$20,000) to facilitate the community planning process. Funding for the CSF contracts is dependent on annual federal and State allocations and was not increased beyond prior funding levels in order to implement the program. As additional funding becomes available, it is added to CSF to conduct pilot projects or expand existing services.

6. The Results/Success of the Program

Committing the time needed to gather input and engage the community, and being responsive to changing politics and mandates resulted in the following successes:

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- Successfully engaged and collaborated with the non-profit community and consumers in the planning processes.
- Community-based agencies and community partners that were not traditional child welfare services contractors came together to work collaboratively to provide a continuum of child welfare services.
- Communities increased their capacity to care for their own children and families.
- Collaboration and trust was built between the County and the community.
- Duplication of services has been significantly reduced.
- Resources are more effectively leveraged.
- Gaps in services are addressed as they are identified.

CSF program successes include:

- In the first year, 2,259 families received in-home support services (147% of goal)
- Child welfare staff played a key role in the CSF implementation planning and activities.
- CSF staff are co-located with County staff so they continue to work closely on a daily basis, communication is expedited and personal relationships have lead to better, more effective services for families.
- County staff provided trainings about the child welfare system to address the differences in the County and community-based agency cultures.
- Countywide CSF staff attend trainings together to develop uniform expertise.
- A countywide parent education curriculum has been developed and implemented.
- All contractors use the same family assessment instruments.
- All contractors have MOUs with the HHSA Family Self-Sufficiency and Domestic Violence Services for Families contractors in their region.
- Eligible children are enrolled in available health insurance plans, have a medical home and receive appropriate immunizations.
- Parents are educated about the dangers of childhood obesity.
- Information provided in parent education classes is reinforced during in-home services.
- County and CSF administrators hold monthly meetings for on-going collaboration.
- Two State funded pilot projects have been implemented to:
 - Provide foster and relative caregivers with education and support groups to teach them how to deal with difficult child behaviors and reduce stress.
 - Provide parents entering the child welfare system with education about the child welfare system and on-going support for successful family reunification.
- A CSF community partner School District received a large Federal grant in large part because of their CSF collaborative relationships.

Family Success Stories: The following are examples of families who benefited when the County and community service systems worked as a team to support the family's unique needs:

Family #1: After parents were reunified with their children, the family became homeless due to the children's destructive behavior in their apartment complex. The school, CWS, CSF and community resources worked together in wraparound planning meetings that led to a detailed supervision plan to control the behavior of the adolescent children, including tutoring and covering football expenses as an incentive for cooperation. The parents, children and

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community members involved in this process knew the details of the plan and their role in making helping the family succeed. The CSF manager stated, “No matter where these kids go in the community there are adults who know who they are and what they are supposed to be doing during the day.”

Family #2: A mother and her 16, 8 and 4 year old twins were living with a friend in a one-bedroom trailer. One of the twins was found wandering in the parking lot. Assessment determined that the mother had a substance abuse problem. Through case management services, she was assisted with entering a treatment program and finding her own apartment. Assessment also showed that one of the twins is autistic and another child has severe learning disabilities. CWS assisted the mother in accessing services for her children. CSF provided assistance completing the SSI forms and advocacy at the SSI interview. Both of the children were determined to be eligible for SSI. CSF also provided translation services for the mother and her 16 year old’s CWS worker in another state. The mother is now self-sufficient and appropriately caring for her children.

Family #3: A young mother had a baby born positive for drugs. She and her 1-year old were living with the mother’s sister and her two children in a one-bedroom house. Through the assistance from CWS and CSF, the mother entered a substance abuse treatment program. She became employed and reunified with her baby. CWS assisted in payment for independent housing and CSF assisted her with the childcare application process. Although her CWS case has closed she continues to meet with her CSF case manager once a month for support and guidance.

7. Worthiness of an Award

County staff became increasingly aware of the need to develop the CSF program with the passage of local, State and national initiatives that push for blended funding and services to help children and families. In addition, State budget concerns and reduced program revenues provided further incentive for stakeholders and community organizations to come together to develop a plan to streamline service delivery for a vulnerable population. The result of the effort is a service delivery model that is built on a shared vision of government and community partners, aimed at enhancing the support system for families. A key component of CSF is the recognition that the community was integral in evaluating current needs, defining services and maximizing available funding. With the development of CSF, the County and local community-based organizations are now delivering a continuum of services to help families in need.